

Narrator:

Maria Pacheco is originally from Guatemala. She's been an organic farmer, social entrepreneur and Fulbright scholar, and works to empower rural women entrepreneurs.

In 2004, Pacheco founded Kiej de los Bosques (Protectors of the Forests) to create eco-friendly economic opportunities for indigenous women. She participated as a mentor in Pathways to Prosperity, a women entrepreneurs' conference in Washington on October 9th, 2009. She talked with us about how the conference helped inspire all those who took part.

Maria Pacheco:

I think, you know, as entrepreneurs we get so far in our countries but then if you have events like this, you open up possibilities that it would have been really hard to reach from Latin America.

For me this has been a very transformative conference and that has happened I think at two levels, you know, like the technical, with all the finance, access to markets, access to different things, but also listening to the four women that are the envoys of this conference. They are so inspiring, and for all of them it's more than business. It's what lies behind that transforms possibilities for people, for the earth, so for me it's been really inspiring but also with very practical things that I say, ok, these are four or five things that I'm taking back that I have to do differently.

I'm paired with a Guatemalan woman who is doing organic composts. I was an organic farmer myself for 12 years so I was, like, really happy. But I think what I liked about it the most is that you know, as entrepreneurs, I think we dream of this amazing world, but at the beginning when you're on your own, you think you have to do it all yourself, and then you meet young people like the women we've met. And it's just young people come with a different – you know, they're really thinking about the environment, about communities, about how to make a better country, so it's beautiful to watch these women and say, you know, if there's a way in which, you know, what I have gone through can also help her, mostly believe in herself and in her dream to really pursue it.

First, I think it's the idea of looking at things differently and just really taking ourselves more seriously. I think as entrepreneurs sometimes we feel like we don't need to grow up, so I'm taking that part of really improving as a general manager, of how it's more about leadership and what you do as a leader for your team and work with your team and empower your team and believe, and make them believe in themselves. And it's been great at this conference just to see things that you think, oh maybe it's just me, and when you see the trend you can say ok, this is something I have to value, like intuition, so I'm taking back many things, so it's been great at all levels.

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